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Preparing Teachers to Teach Across Dialects.

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The author discusses fields of inquiry important to the planners of teacher-preparation programs because they have some sort of help to offer the teacher of Standard English as a Second Dialect. Linguistics describes the student's home language, shows the teacher what needs to be noticed about the target dialect, and how that feature of the dialect works. Cultural Anthropology shows the culture within which the student's language functions--the values, allegiances, and sources of pride--and calls attention to such features as gestures and spatial distances between speakers. (Both Linguistics and Cultural Anthropology must be interpreted by staff members who understand the concerns of specialists in those fields.) The School of Education has specialists in curriculum and related subjects who know about songs, games, and stories that appeal to various age groups, and can also give guidelines for classroom management. Other relevant disciplines are Communication with its emphasis on "What to say to whom, for what purpose, and with what effect." Rhetoric, which offers an antidote to misapplications of transformational grammar; and Literature, which enlarges the mind and "opens windows on the world." In planning teacher-preparation programs, resources from all these fields should be used. (AMM)

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PREPARING TEACHERS TO TEACH ACROSS DIALECTS

When programs are being planned for teachers of Standard English as a Second Dialect, two questions come to mind. First, what can the planners learn from past experience--experience with preparing people to teach English as a Foreign Language? And second, what more has to be learned?

If the experience of the 1950's and 1960's has taught us anything, it has made clear the importance of getting teachers to compare the target language with the student's own vernacular. Among other things, this means finding out about the linguistic system exemplified by the individual student's speech. That is not the same as "spotting his errors."

Where second-dialect students are concerned, for instance, the teacher needs to get answers to such questions as these: Under what circumstances does the student's dialect construct sentences without a form of BE (where Standard dialects would use BE)? What do members of this dialect group do about the indefinite article a? When is it used, when not? How do speakers of this dialect habitually signal past time?

For information of this sort, the teacher-preparation program draws upon the resources of descriptive linguistics. Studies by William Labov, William Stewart, Beryl Bailey, Roger Shuy and others help the teacher here, by giving an objective view of the student's home language. Linguistic studies also mention points of contrast between the vernacular and the target language, and these points of contrast in turn suggest

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items for classroom practice.

Sometimes the linguist's findings also suggest what kind of practice may produce best results. A linguist may show, for example, that a second-dialect student who has trouble putting the third-person singular -s on a verb like talk or explain (which ends in a consonant sound) may be able to manage the -s in practice exercises involving verbs like see and play (where the final sound is a vowel)--and that even a verb form like talks or explains can most profitably be practiced first in a sentence like He talks a lot or She explains it, where the troublesome consonant cluster is followed by a word beginning with a vowel.

Many insights of this kind can be derived from the Linguistics component of the teacher-preparation program. When teacher participants complain of "too much linguistics," it is usually because they have not been shown clearly enough how the linguists' findings can help a teacher help students in a classroom.

Of course the role of linguistics in the teacher-preparation program goes beyond describing the student's home language. Linguists also show the teacher what needs to be noticed about the target dialect--noticed by the teacher, who then can show the students how that feature of the dialect works. Linguists are people who make it their business to observe and describe things that native speakers of a language have not stopped to notice. Linguists find out what accounts for the fact that Standard English speakers sometimes choose to use the present perfect tense, and on other occasions choose the so-called simple past. Linguists call attention to the power wielded by a seemingly insignificant word

like a in a pair of sentences like The secretary gave me paper and The secretary gave me a paper--where the word paper suddenly stands for a document instead of blank stationery. The power of a is perceived, of course, by Standard-dialect-speaking children. Ask such a child what is the difference between "We won't have a school" and "We won't have school" and he'll tell you: "One means the taxpayers have voted down a bond issue; the other one means another snow day, no school!"

Linguists observe many commonplace mysteries that the average speaker has not consciously noted or described. Teachers of English across dialects need to have the workings of the system pointed out, in order to help their students master the system. That is why our profession has learned to value the contributions of linguists who compare the target language with the student's home speech. Such comparisons show teachers what will need to be taught vigorously, and why.

From a related discipline, Cultural Anthropology, program planners have learned the importance of knowing about the life contexts out of which the students come--about the culture within which the students' language functions, about the students' values and allegiances and sources of pride. Hence the current emphasis upon sociology and Negro History in programs for preparing people to teach across dialects. It is an emphasis quite in keeping with what has been discovered about the interplay of language and culture during these past decades.

Findings from anthropology and the other social sciences belong in a program for teachers of Standard English as a Second Dialect, not only to acquaint teachers with their students' life styles, but also to call

attention to hitherto unnoticed features of the cultural context within which the Standard dialect is used. Studies of gestures, and observations concerning the use of space in interpersonal communication, for example, make helpful contributions to the language teacher's preparation.

So far, mention has been made of sample contributions from two disciplines: linguistics and the social sciences (particularly cultural anthropology). Information, ideas and attitudes developed by workers in those fields have become standard essentials in programs for preparing teachers to teach English across cultures.

But one point should be stressed. In teacher-preparation programs, both Linguistics and Cultural Anthropology need to be interpreted by some staff member who understands the concerns of specialists in those fields, who recognizes implications in the specialists' findings, and who at the same time knows the facts of life in a second-dialect classroom.

EFL training programs need such "interpreters," too: but in second-dialect programs the need is vital. Few second-dialect teachers share the researcher's zeal for pure research. Few consider scholarship its own excuse for being. Many who enroll in workshops and institutions are experienced teachers who feel harried, discouraged, understandably cynical. When such a teacher sits down among scientists who bombard her with unintelligible--and sometimes uncomplimentary--irrelevancies (or apparent irrelevancies), the teacher can't help feeling like Alice at the Mad Hatter's tea party. First these exasperating individuals confuse her, then they scold her, and finally they send her away with a "There now, that solves everything" and expect her to feel grateful.

Somewhere in the teacher-preparation program, participants need to be shown how to take a linguistic fact and set it down in the midst of other facts that have been learned about human beings--beings with built-in notions of what is boring or fun, useless or worthwhile. For instance, having noted that a given language pattern (such as the question pattern with BE and the -ing form of a verb) needs to be practiced by a group of second-dialect youngsters, someone should remind the teachers that there are songs which (a) are enjoyed by that age-group, and (b) repeatedly use that language pattern. Then, having hit upon "Are You Sleeping, Brother John?" for example, as a likely choice from both these standpoints, teachers can be led to devise game-style extensions. For instance, one child may pantomime an action while others sing "Are you writing (or reading, or eating, or jumping, or skipping, etc.)--?" and the pantomimist answers "Yes, I am" or "No, I'm not."

Activities of this kind are now becoming familiar to many teachers, thanks in large part to workshops and institutes which have shown how linguistic findings can be dealt with in the classroom. Linguists can help by getting teachers to focus on features of Standard English important enough to give children heavy doses of. But finding palatable, effective ways of administering the doses--that is something outside the linguists' domain. For that, help often has to come from another quarter.

Clearly, second-dialect teaching requires insights and skills which EFL training programs have seldom taken much responsibility for developing. When participants have not acquired them elsewhere, the program should offer instruction in these matters. This may mean entrusting

part of the second-dialect teacher-preparation program to specialists in Curriculum and related subjects in the School of Education, who know about songs, games and stories that appeal to various age groups, and can also give guidelines for classroom management.

Planners of programs ought also to keep in mind something else about the students whom their trainees will be teaching. Second-dialect students need to be read to in school, more than their age-mates who hear Standard English at home. Consequently, some attention to Oral Interpretation in the preparation program may prove useful. Children (and even teenagers) from minority-group backgrounds repeatedly demonstrate lack of familiarity with old favorites that are often read aloud to suburban children at bedtime. Traditional rhymes, tall tales, fantasies, myths, fables--these are part of the heritage of all English-speaking people. Second-dialect students actually enjoy them, especially when the old favorites are read aloud, at least in part, by teachers who can read them well.

A flexible view of the teacher-preparation program also allows for including other disciplines not commonly prescribed for teachers of English as a Foreign Language. One is a field of study that aroused keen interest during the 1940's and 1950's under the rubric of Communication. Teachers of Communication Skills urged their students to consider Who says What to Whom, for What Purpose, and with What Effect. It may now be time to bring this version of the Lasswell formula to the attention of second-dialect students and their teachers. For one thing, the formula reinforces what linguists are saying about the coexistence of a variety

of styles, all available to speakers of English--a repertoire from which speakers consciously or unconsciously choose the style appropriate to the occasion.

If certain ideas and work habits germane to the Communication field can be useful to a teacher of Standard English as a Second Dialect, so too can a far older discipline--Rhetoric. Rhetoric, too, is concerned with the specific effects produced by what a person writes or says. Which sentence is better--"Jack Ruby, who killed Lee Harvey Oswald, was a night club owner" or "Jack Ruby, who was a night club owner, killed Lee Harbey Oswald"? It all depends, says Rhetoric. Then Rhetoric goes on to show what happens to the reader when each possible arrangement is used.

Thus Rhetoric offers an antidote to misapplications of Transformational Grammar, which give students the mistaken impression all transforms that are grammatical are equally valid in all contexts. Moreover, Rhetoric is appreciated by many second-dialect students because it takes the emphasis off fettering commandments that seem to say "Thou shalt not talk the way thy best friends talk." Rhetoric accentuates the positive, arrays before the student a number of possible patterns and then helps him decide among them. The considerations which enter into such decisions have nothing to do with social snobbery; the questions raised are questions like these: What happens to the pace of a story when an adjective clause is stripped down to make an appositive? Which of three possible patterns does more to play up or play down the writer's particular point? Often a rhetoric lesson succeeds in engaging the interest of older students of Standard English as a Second Dialect. So the recipe for a

second-dialect teacher's program ought to include at least a dash of Rhetoric.

Rhetoric, Communication, Oral Interpretation, plus assorted ingredients with Educational labels, like Curriculum, Psychology of Learning, and Language Arts. Surely no one could seriously propose requiring courses in all these fields, in addition to the indispensable learnings about the sound system, the cultural context, and so on? Perhaps not courses, no--though that would depend on the length of the training program and the academic past of the program's clientele. But then, this has not been a discussion of courses; at least it was not intended to be. Instead, the aim has been to touch upon fields of inquiry which have some sort of help to offer the teacher of Standard English as a Second Dialect. Whether the help is to come through a cluster of courses, through selected readings, through an interdisciplinary seminar, or through all or none of these--that is a different kind of question. What matters most is that somehow second-dialect teachers ought to be made to think about concerns which are central to each of those fields, concerns which relate to the teachers' own job of waking students up to the marvelous, magical ways of language in human life.

It is within the ecumenical spirit of the age to cross denominational lines in search of light and strength. Already the foregoing remarks have taken us across some traditional boundaries between academic fields. Can we "linguistically oriented" language teachers take one further step beyond, into other branches of the humanities? In English classes for speakers of non-standard dialects there is a place for care-

fully selected poetry, fiction and drama that has stood the test of time. The current rejection of banal suburban stories (the kind too often found in children's textbooks) is cheering and long overdue. But it will be disappointing if the pale party dresses and cute puppies of yore are merely to be replaced by trash cans and sanitation trucks--in stories that are still banal.

Consider the arguments that have been advanced, down through the centuries, for the teaching of literature. Literature puts human experience into perspective, gives people a way of thinking about life's problems and trials. Literature enlarges the mind, opens windows on the world, enables people to appreciate what others are up against, in circumstances different from their own. Literature offers the safest means of temporary escape from the cage of one's own personality...If the student of Standard English as a Second Dialect does not need literature, then who does?

If second-dialect students do need some contact with literature, then their teachers need to learn how to introduce them to it. Obviously literature requires special handling in classes where Standard English is not the students' home dialect. The works to be read have to be chosen with care. Sometimes one can successfully use only portions of a novel, or selected scenes from a play, sometimes even selected stanzas or lines from a poem. But if a student can be led to respond to just one line of Whitman's "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking," or to empathize with a character in one scene from a Steinbeck novel (with Frankie in Cannery Row, for example), then--for that student--language learning stands as

chance. In that one glimpse of the potentialities of language--of simple words wisely chosen and artfully combined--it may flash upon the student's mind that English is not a dreary invention of schoolteachers, not the schoolteachers' privileged preserve, fenced about with No Trespassing signs. Once language has been viewed as a force in human life worth attending to, as something exciting and beyond price yet accessible to all, language mastery becomes possible.

Thus it appears that skills, insights and information which may help second-dialect teachers have been developed in such seemingly disparate fields as Linguistics, Cultural Anthropology, Education, Communication, Rhetoric, Literature, and other branches of the humanities. Doesn't it behoove planners of teacher-preparation programs to draw upon resources from all these fields?